

# Would you like to swing on a Starbucks. Carry moonbeams home in a java.

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

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You can clearly see why Gary Bracey would have been chomping at the bit to secure the rights to produce a tie-in game based on the 1991 surrealist slapstick comedy movie, Hudson Hawk. No, not because the title is a nickname for the *bracing* winds that envelope the Hudson River, although capitalising on the puntential admittedly might have been fun.

It was to star hot celluloid property Bruce Willis who by this stage had already found worldwide fame and critical acclaim headlining the action blockbusters Die Hard I and II, and dramedy vehicle Moonlighting, and had a \$40m budget to lavish on what was to be his pet project. How was Gary to

know it would go on to be almost universally panned by the critics and exemplified as the *anti*-blueprint - the shining example - of how *not* to produce a summer box office smash hit?

On the contrary, to say he had high hopes would be somewhat of an understatement. Asked to reflect on the 'early adopter' prospect presented to him long before the smug world of hindsight-goggled critique took root, Gary revealed to me, "Over the years I read dozens and dozens of scripts and Hudson Hawk was the best I had ever read (written by Shane Black)! Unfortunately, what ended up on screen wasn't anything resembling the initial draft. Could have (SHOULD have) been a great movie!"

Hudson Hawk you could say was a vanity ego trip of an opus for Bruce, an impetus that rarely bodes well for the entertainment medium. While it was his brainwave and he was the Hollywood megastar riding the bus ads, it was actually financed by The Matrix producer, Joel Silver. Investing that much money in the project it was hardly likely he'd give Bruce carte blanche freedom over the creative process, and he wasn't the only one who brought artistic differences of opinion to the table. Everyone and their pooch chipped in, leading to numerous script rewrites, reshoots, and heated exchanges.



"It was a stinking pile of steaming hot donkey droppings and you are an idiot" - **Richard E. Grant's** response to Mark Kermode upon being told he enjoyed Hudson Hawk despite the vitriolically negative press.

The schedule and budget (\$65m by the final reckoning) inevitably overran and the resulting oeuvre is a disjointed, shambolic blancmange of a piece that makes no sense as a narrative whole. It won three awards, though not the kind anyone involved should be remotely proud of - Razzies for Worst Director (Michael Lehmann), Worst Screenplay and Worst Picture. Hudson Hawk made a loss of \$79m and was in fact heavily implicated in the closure of TriStar Pictures! Bruce, on the other hand, has been known to confuse it with another movie entirely...

"It has very intellectual hip humor in it; it has very sophomoric broad slapstick comedy; it has elements of a road picture; it has more romance than any film that I have ever done; it has action; it has big stunts; it has a very dark sensibility... It's a film that needs to be experienced more than explained..."

If you feel the vaguest notion that any of the rancour might be hyperbole, consider the line delivered completely out of the blue by 'Butterfinger', one of the candy bar name-saked CIA goons during a debate concerning how to keep Hawk and his new sweetheart in check: "do you want me to rape them?" It's not even funny or relevant in context because there *is* no wider context to mitigate this lead balloon. It's simply a standalone... quip? It goes nowhere and is never mentioned again, thankfully!

Bruce plays a cat burglar who has moments ago been released from a ten-year prison stretch for turning over a federal building and is determined to go straight. Ironically it's his own parole officer who blackmails him into pulling off the heist of the century on behalf of the mafia, fronted by the Mario Brothers (one of whom is portrayed by Sly Stallone's brother, Frank), the first of many Nintendo references... the most noteworthy of course being the one to playing Nintendo in 1981. Any NES fans will know immediately why that's a glaringly conspicuous goof. Oops! It does make you wonder if some product placement cash exchanged hands here - clearly there's no knowledge or love of the subject matter in evidence to warrant the homage.

The endless chain of people pulling the strings grows ever more convoluted as the 'plot' progresses, extending all the way up to the pope, though all we really need to know is that our best friend has been kidnapped and his life hangs in the balance unless we agree to pilfer three ancient artefacts each harbouring a piece of crystal. These can be used to construct Leonardo da Vinci's 'La Macchina dell'Oro' gold-generating alchemy machine; a device a zany, larger than life, megalomaniac couple known as the Mayflowers intend to use to flood the economy with gold, crashing the global market and making the world dependent on their alternative financing schemes. I won't dwell on the ruse too long seeing

as it makes absolutely no sense, probably not even to the scriptwriters themselves who I suspect just wanted to draw a line under this project and move on to something more... well, *anything* else really.



I don't suppose for a nanosecond Leo predicted this anarchic scenario, yet he *was* concerned that his accidental invention (he was trying to produce bronze initially) created precisely 500 years prior to the commencement of the movie would fall into the wrong hands, hence disassembled it, hiding the source of its power (the crystals) so as never to be discovered. Well, he separated and inserted them into miniature replicas of three of his works anyway. Not quite the same thing, but there you go.

Special FX - commissioned by Ocean - quite sensibly cut through this gibberish to isolate the core themes of the movie, exploiting these as hat stands upon which to hang their loosely interpreted eight-month game project.

"Hudson Hawk was a movie tie-in, and the movie stank. Very early on in development, Joffa and Chaz decided not to follow the movie in any way except for using the same locations. As we had been playing a lot of New Zealand Story in the office, I think that this was a major point of influence for the design. Looking back now on my artwork for this game, there does seem to be a HUGE amount of bricks in the levels, probably the same brick just in a different colour. In fact, bar a few exceptions, the backgrounds don't look very good at all. The static screens and boss/puzzle sections look quite nice, but some of those backgrounds, eek... not good at all. But hey, at least I got to animate nuns on roller-skates in this game; also, one of the security guards in the game was based on a bloody miserable, grumpy old security guard where we were actually working in Liverpool."

**Ivan Davies recalls working on the graphics for the 8-bit Commodore version (interview with C64.com)**



Special FX's velvety smooth-scrolling Hudson Hawk is a classy action platformer cast in the tried and tested Rick Dangerous mould. Nearly seven months into the

development cycle it was to adopt a flick-screen approach, illuminating a section of the map at a time much like Switchblade, though Ocean must have had second thoughts at the 11th hour before the concept had been implemented into the final release. Quite a significant switch so close to D-day.

While it's a fairly traditional affair, there are enough novel nuances to separate it from the congested milieu; the capacity to manipulate boxes to gain higher ground, the detection avoidance mechanic, crossing chasms by shuffling along telephone cables, and employing your projectiles to remotely toggle switches. All these elements lend a few welcome twists that assuredly raise the bar over and above the competition.



Code was provided courtesy of Ian Moran, whereas the beautifully drawn/animated sprites and backdrops were the responsibility of Colin Rushby, Chas Davies, Ivan Davies and Karen Davies (who was LOL-ingly "asked to put more hair on the Bruce Willis character"! ). Setting the tongue-in-cheek tone to a tee (as if it wasn't *already* firmly in place!), Keith Tinman was the man behind the gloriously madcap, OTT, relentlessly arcadey sound effects and music. Their contributions as a whole culminate in a cartoony caper that ramps up the zany-o-meter to 103, and then jumps out of the screen at you with a custard pie and a devilish glint in its eye.





Normally it might have been fair to criticise the developers for playing fast and loose with their interpretation of the movie license. With this one, however, you have to congratulate them for salvaging *any* kind of game from the dire source material. So what if 99% of the baddies are random novelty creations that bear no relation to the movie whatsoever? What would there be left to work with



otherwise? Musical duets? Being knocked out repeatedly? Dolphin impersonations? A bucktoothed meathead confusing France with Italy while he's actually visiting the latter country?

"Basically when we were given this project, we were supposed to go and watch the movie, but it wasn't ready in a preview state at this time for us to watch, so we were given only an early script, and I might add, they said it may change for the final script, and it did! So basically we had to work out set locations to base the levels on, and what kind of game to put in it, and come up with various baddy types for those locations, based on main characters in the movie, and fictional ones that may be at the location, and some comedy ones, as the movie was a comedy, we pretty much had a free range of creativity on what went in."

**Jim Bagley explains how the game came to deviate so far from its inspiration (Retro Video Gamer interview)**

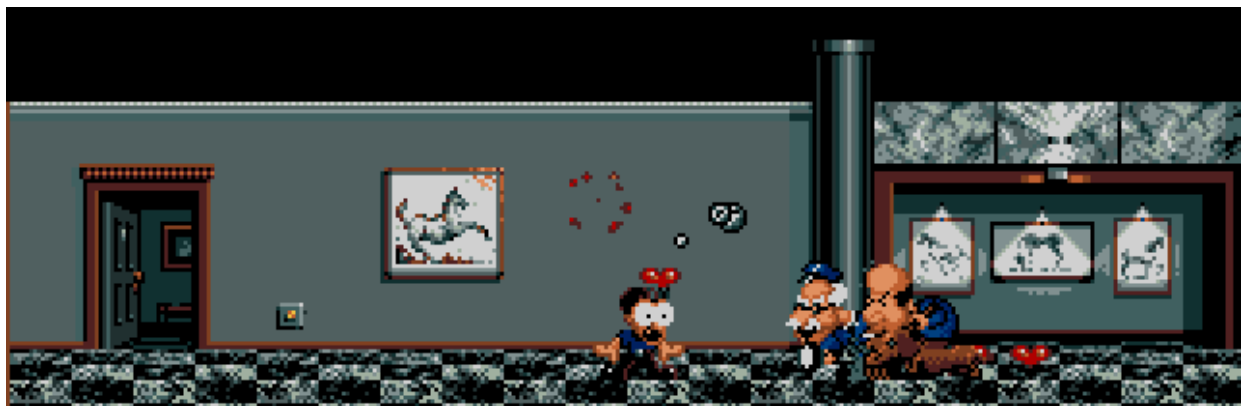
Playing as a character who looks nothing at all like Eddie 'Hudson Hawk' Hawkins for licensing reasons, your first challenge is to enter Rutherford's Auction Houses.



"...not only was it a flop in the movies, but Bruce Willis didn't want us to have his face on the sprite, as it supposedly couldn't do him justice lol.

It's a shame the film was such a flop, as I quite liked playing the game on the GameBoy :)"

**Jim Bagley discusses developing the Spectrum and GameBoy version (ZX Spectrum Games blog interview)**



Once inside you must tip-toe around the invisible laser beams to avoid tripping the alarm system, dodge the ever-

watchful gaze of the security cameras, locate and crack the safe protecting a maquette of the Sforza horse sculpture, and 'liberate' it. We won't linger here on the fact that it turns out to be a forgery, that's not important to the progression of the game, *or* the movie really.

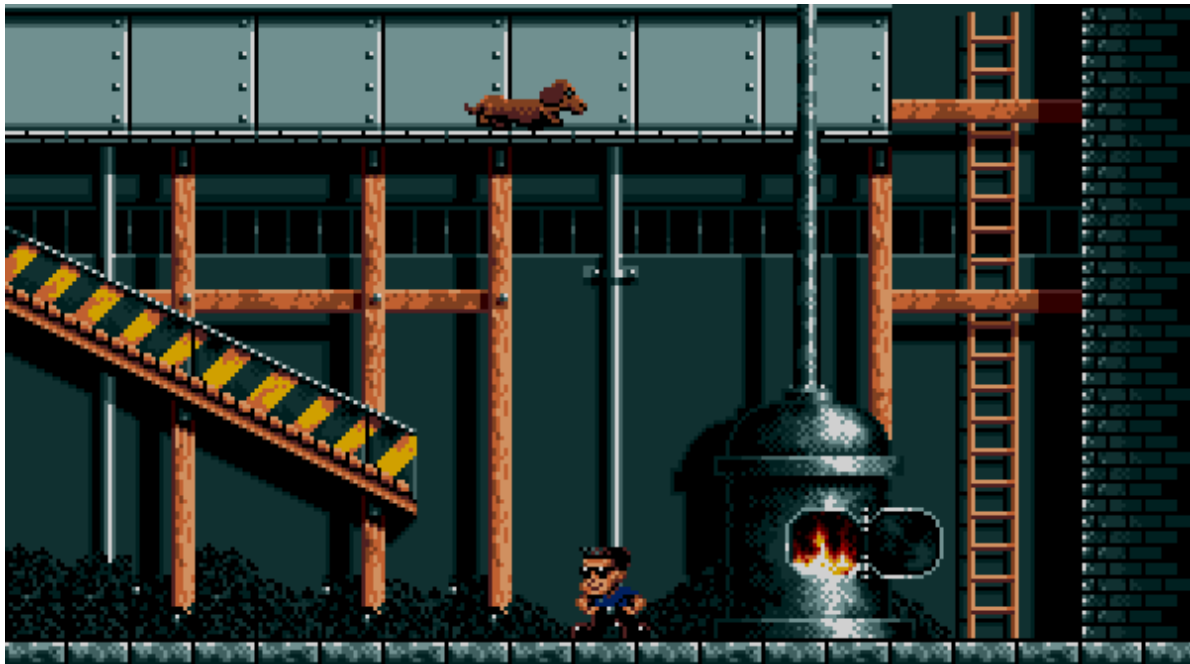


This first level is split across seven floors beginning with the rooftop - the building itself is accessed via an open window leading onto the corridors. Standing between you and horsey are armed guards, paparazzi-wannabe brats, mountain bikers, slathering security rottweilers who are brainwashed to drag you off the edge of the building, birds on a wire (probably *not* a Mel Gibson joke) and decrepit janitors whose brooms have a consciousness all of their own, which you'll witness once their masters kick the bucket.



Unlike in the movie, you're *not* totally defenceless; pixel sprite Bruce comes fully equipped with an endless supply of launchable softballs, and a boxing glove for close combat. These softballs - believe it or not - *are* relevant to the movie, specifically the scene where Bruce hurls one at a window in the Vatican library to allow him to pitch his grappling hook through the broken glass to find purchase and swing across onto the roof and make his getaway. As for the boxing glove, that's a complete mystery. They're useful comedy props and that's likely enough.

Shuting (as in sliding down a shute) comically into stage three, we find ourselves traversing the inner sanctum of the air ducts, fending off dachshunds of all possible adversaries (rather than fox terriers called Bunny as in the movie) as we dodge flames and oil slicks, disable extractor fans and shimmy across ceiling pipes over deadly exposed electricity transformers. If the mutts sink their gnashers into your backside there's no way to shake them off - your only option is to complete the level or die trying! Best then to make them dance by stunning them with your softballs before they get the chance.



Stage four is the auction room itself where the safe resides ...watch out for that falling mummy! It's squirrelled away behind a priceless painting accessed via skateboards in the movie to allow Bruce and bosom buddy Tommy 'Five-Tone'

Messina (played by Danny Aiello) to glide under the security guard's booth without being detected while crooning along to Johnny Burke's 'Swinging on a Star'.



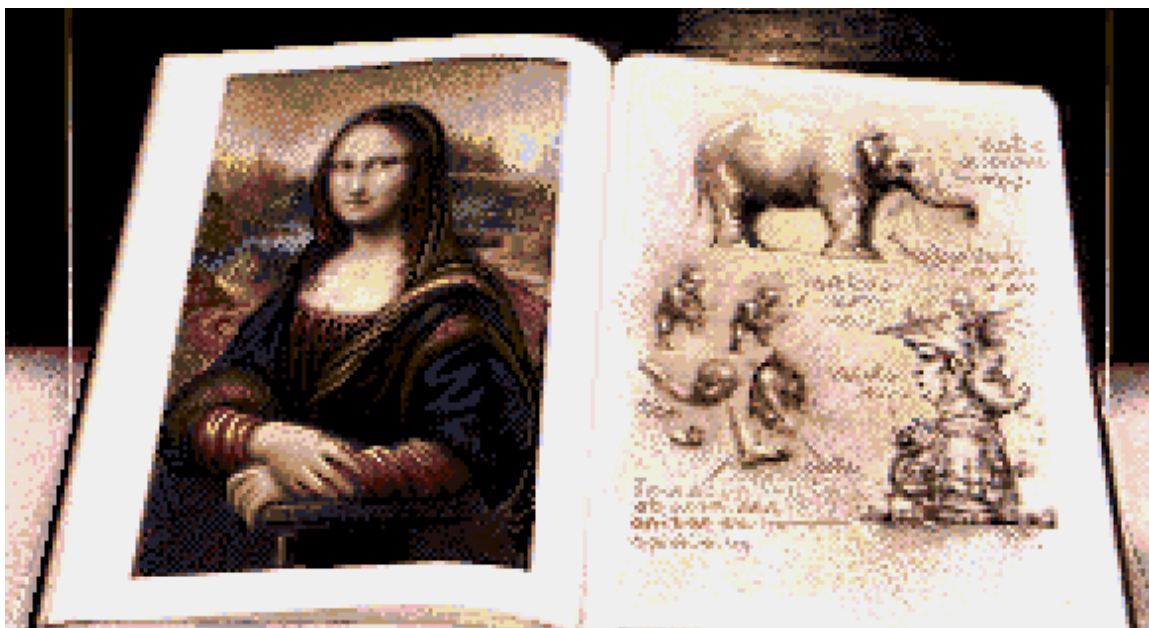
Cracking the safe entails matching the four-digit code displayed by pressing the fire button at the crucial moment as the dial cycles at high velocity past the relevant number. If you can beat it on your first attempt you must possess latent master criminal potential and should perhaps rethink your career trajectory. Fail and you still progress to the next level, except you don't get to see a picture of a lovely horse. In any case there are no sugar lumps involved and it's not running through a field, so no great loss there. I mean its fetlocks aren't even animated for Jack's sake.





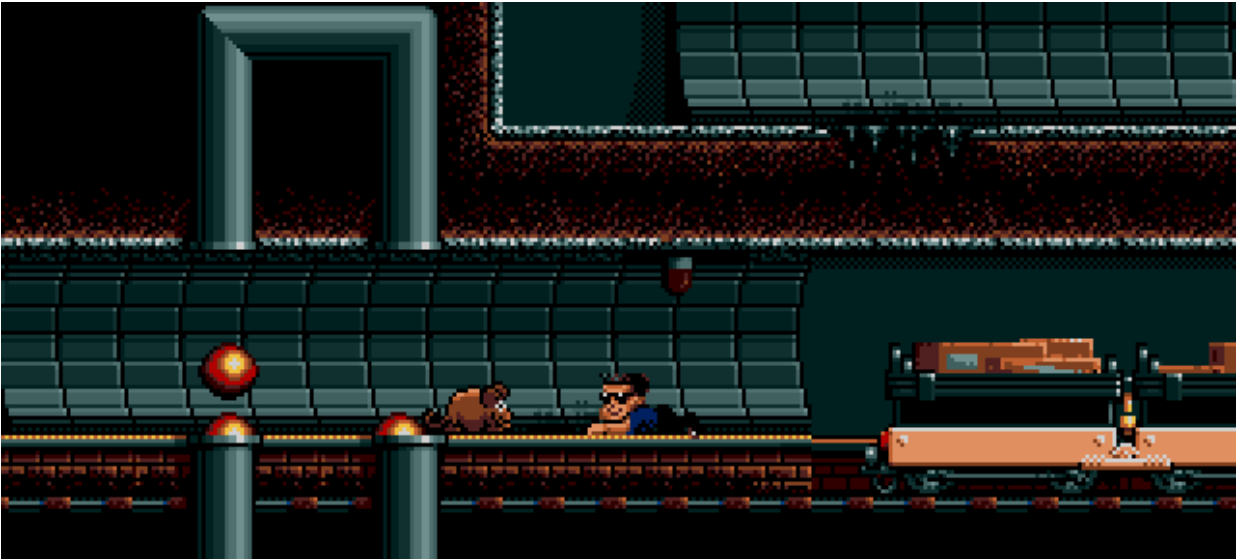
On level two the goal is to breach the Vatican museum in Rome and track down da Vinci's Codex notebook containing

the instructions needed to rebuild his lead to gold alchemy machine... curiously purchased by Bill Gates for \$30.8m in November 1994! Entry is accomplished via the city's underground railway 'Poste Vaticane' mail delivery network where you're confronted by Tefal foreheaded waiters, wheelbarrow-bomb pushing nuns and letter-flinging mailmen.



It's Vatican tunnel time in stage seven so I hope you've got your rat (and barking sloth?) repellent ready! You'll be crossing electrified train tracks on pump carts, climbing

ladders and being sucked through pipes a la Mario through secret catacombs en route to the roof.



Above ground parachuting soldiers disguised as dishevelled nuns and pogo-ing golliwogs (when we were still allowed to say that word!) threaten to give you skydiving lessons minus a safety net as you race towards the Vatican's dome and the open window leading inside where buxom-breasted nuns emerge from the floor Ghouls 'n' Ghosts style, this time armed with clown kit cream pies. Incidentally the pogo-ers continue pogo-ing even after you've batted away their pogo stick, which is a goofy touch that should make you smile.



Quite logically, the library is where you'll ultimately find da Vinci's notebook, along with a marauding rhino and human-flipping trap doors, of course! I wonder if someone mistook the stuffed toy elephant in the movie for a rhino. Bruce swipes this from a precocious 'cherub' and tosses it at the exhibit to trigger the security system and create a diversion,

as well as clearing the room of patrons in preparation for the next part of operation alchemy machine. Special FX captured the elephant drawing in Leo's Codex (and it looks remarkably like an elephant) so that doesn't explain it. Note that the trap doors can be tamed by dislodging heavy books from the cupboards and shunting them into position.

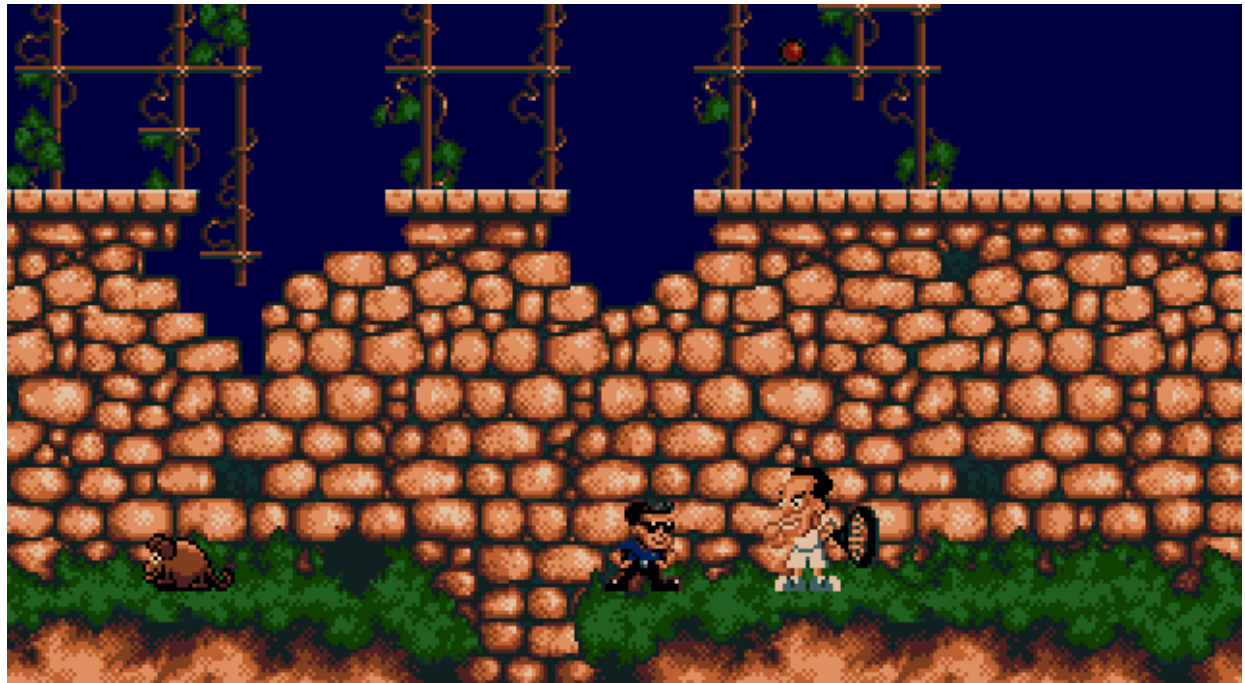


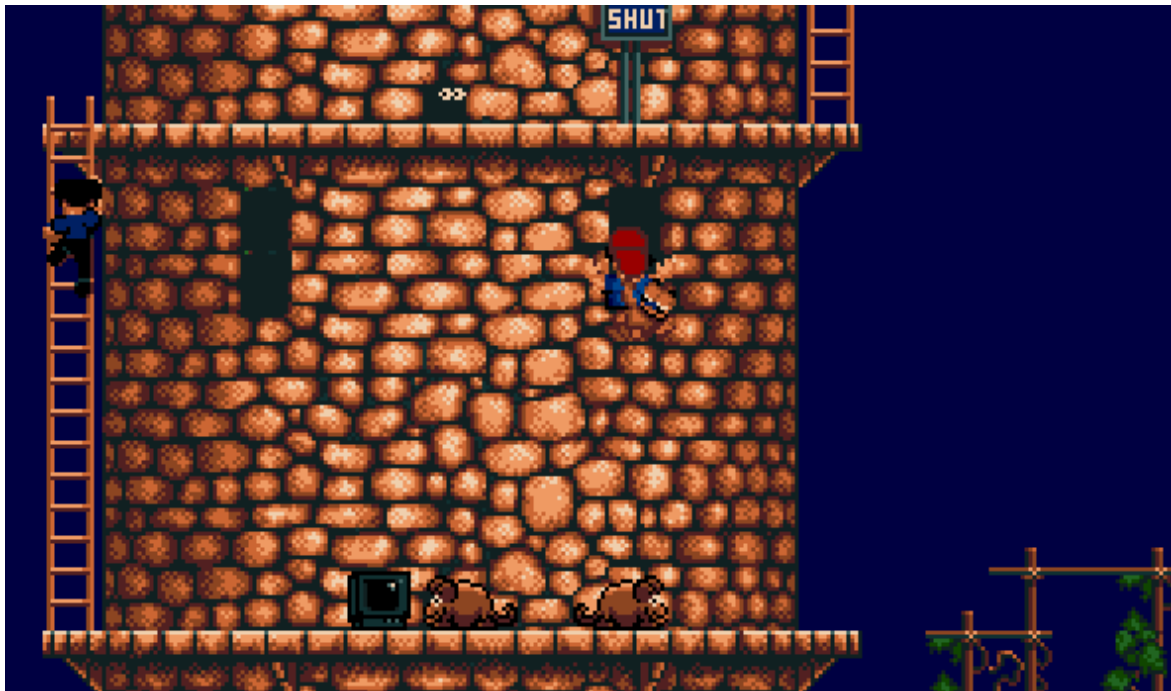
Before we can lay our grubby mitts on the dusty tome we'll need the key to the door marked 'libido' (Latin for lust, relevant because, because...) leading to 'The Codex Room'. In the movie the book is pilched using a fishing rod whilst the security guard flounders, trapped inside the automated protective cage Bruce triggers at the critical moment. Here in pixel land life is a tad simpler, so let's hop across a few protracting bricks, evade the rainbow jester's pointy spears and walk into the artefact to collect it, wasting no time in moving on to stage twelve, the grounds of da Vinci's Castle where rent a mob are currently squatting while they hatch their not so cunning plan.



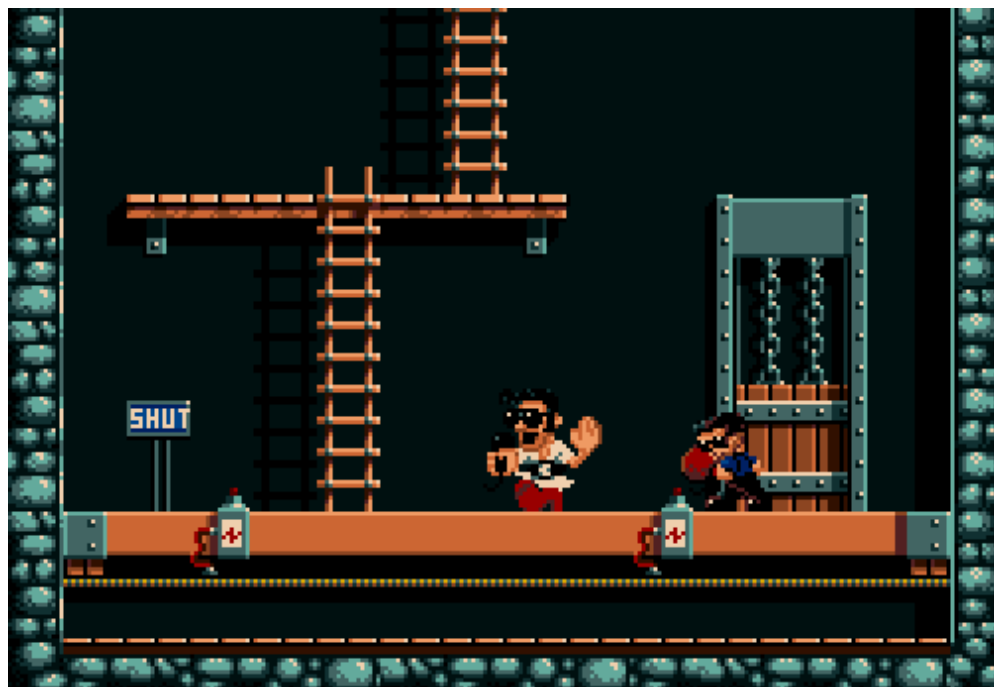
More wacky foes await to harass poor Hawk whose only humble desire is to get a decent cappuccino - prior to the days when there was a Starbucks and Costa Coffee on every street corner - and be left in peace long enough to slurp it. Clearly those who received a *different* memo entirely include Darwin Mayflower dressed as Tim Henman, apparently lost in Tuscany kicking kangaroos, dart throwing sprogs, more wayward marsupials, helium ballooning brats with pistols, TNT chucking henchmen, and TV/pot plant/teddy/guitar lobbing pests.





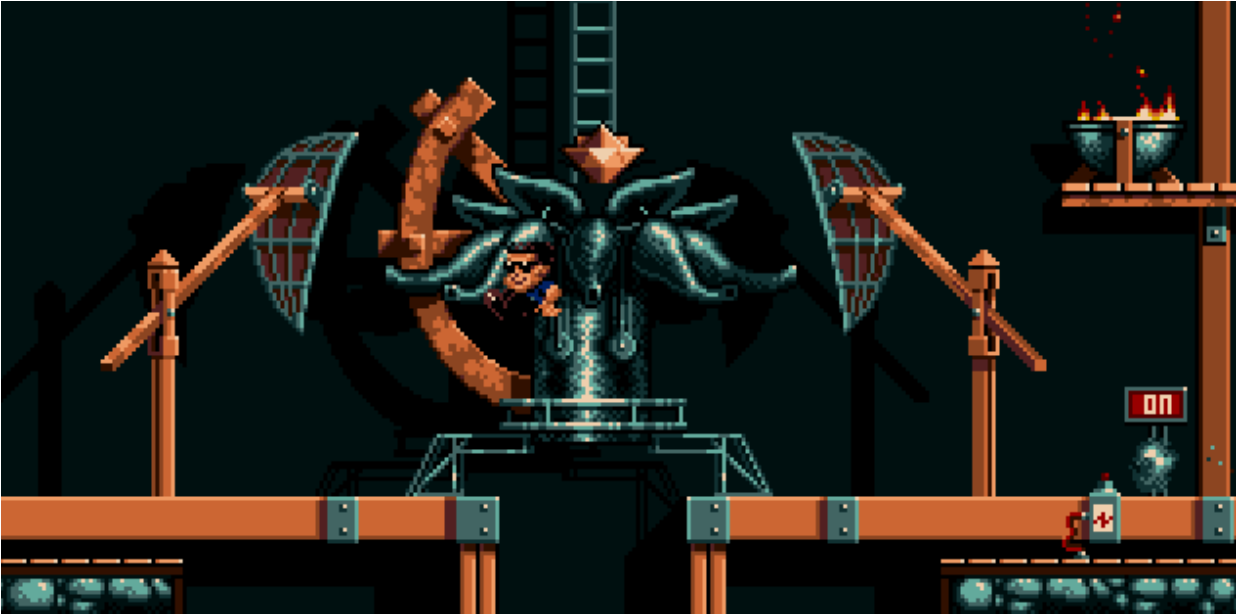


Unlucky for some it's stage 13 and now we're *inside* the castle. Our biggest threats here are indestructible bats, Minerva tooled up with a limitless supply of bombs, and a karate-chopping Elvis, or is it an impersonator? You decide. Oh, and the ghost of Leo himself.





Rather than yolk the final piece of the puzzle from the model helicopter situated in the Louvre Museum in Paris, by level 3 Hawk decides the time's right to foil the crime syndicate's dastardly machinations by instead rooting out the mirrored crystal from Castle da Vinci and engaging it to destroy the alchemy machine. Not that you witness any of this. It's a case of grab and go. The end. Enter your name in the high score table. Switch off computer. Recaffeinate.

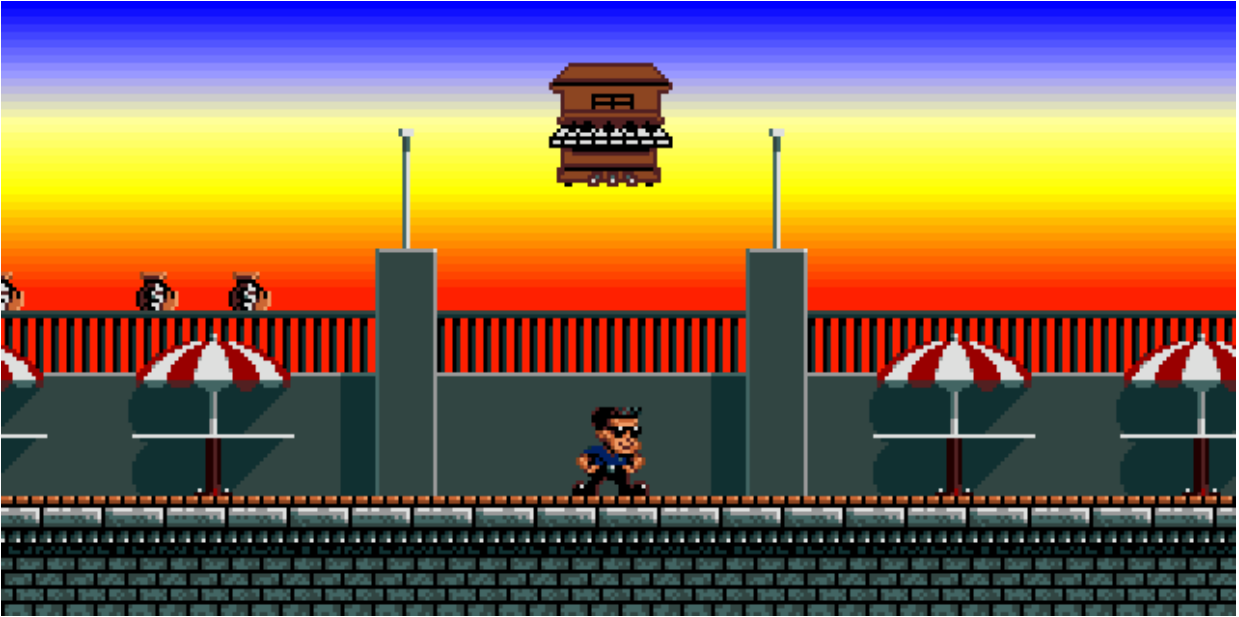


Not quite what happens in the movie it should be highlighted - on the silver screen Bruce is coerced into constructing the alchemy machine at 'dog-point' having refused to steal the replica helicopter, forcing the crooks to acquire it themselves. He seemingly agrees, though sabotages the plan by speculatively holding back one of the crystals when assembling the other parts. Malfunctioning spectacularly, the machine explodes, coating Minerva Mayflower in presumably red hot molten lead and electrocuting Darwin Mayflower, while Bruce and art critic/nun/never gonna happen (or will it?) love interest, Anna, escape on da Vinci's flying glider contraption.



None of this is really elucidated in the game adaptation, presupposing you're already familiar with the preposterous movie, which I suppose you *would* be if you were buying the home computer translation in 1991, possessed a pair of eyes and lived on planet earth where it was widely marketed.

Wavy-armed, skidding, dust cloud mobilising inertia aside - a major niggle for a number of critics at the time of release - the flighty one is considered a well-crafted example of the genre that doesn't skimp on endearing flourishes of attention to detail. This is most apparent in its execution of the hands-pocketed foot-tapping idle animation, and angel-flying-to-heaven death animation, as well as a novel blend of the two - a 'you've been hanging around without moving a muscle for way way too long and now you're going to pay for it' animation. Fair enough, anyone who can't find the pause button - nearly always the 'p' key strangely enough - *deserves* to have a piano dropped on their head!



Hudson Hawk was quite rightly recognised as one of the better platformers for the Amiga, albeit some way from hall of fame fodder. Amiga Action rated it 82%, largely praising the competent conversion, whilst levelling their positivity with a caveat concerning the repetitive nature of the gameplay. Had they access to YouTube and longplay recordings of the game at the time and realised it could be completed in about half an hour, they may not have been so concerned with its longevity. Well, not really - it's a ridiculously unforgiving hellspawn of a tormentor so you'll need to possess superhuman reflexes in order to whizz through it at breakneck speed, if at all.

CU Amiga - clearly up for a laugh - were won over by the comedy vibe running throughout, so much so they dished up a coveted Screenstar award and an 86% final score.

Amiga Power's Stuart Campbell wanted to like it more, yet found the awkward controls, overly Rick Dangerous-y-ness, and propensity towards forcing you to repeat areas of the map following your demise, a turn-off. These drawbacks and his preference for the 'superior' Blues Brothers game



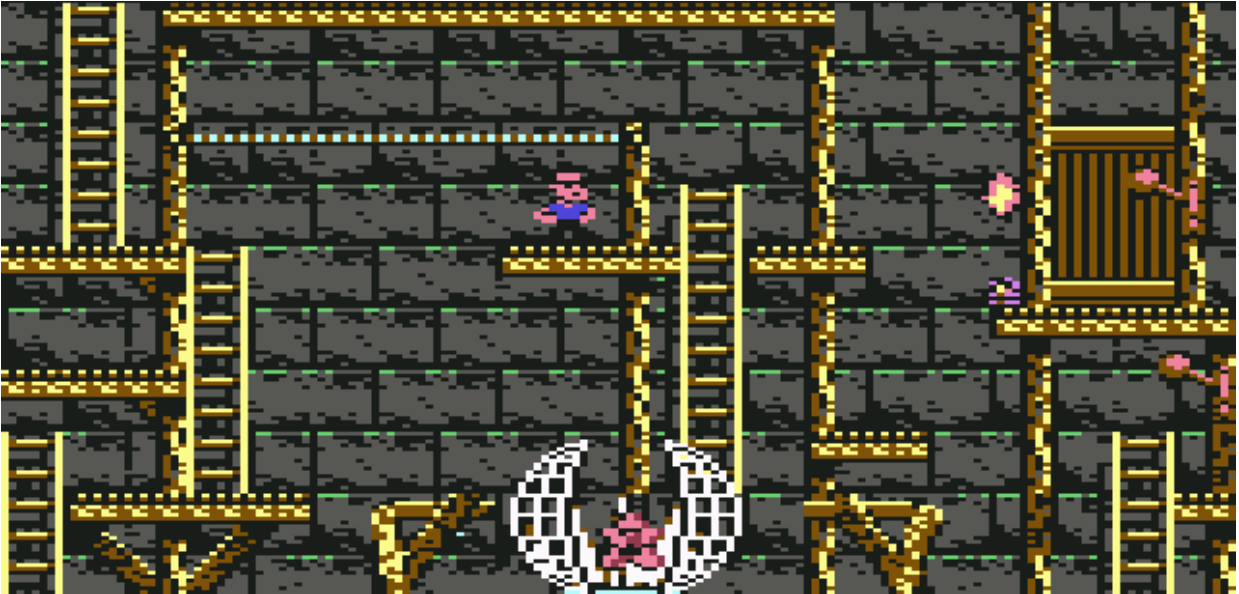
combined he surmised amounted to a 25% penalty, and therefore a 75% final reckoning. See what I did there with the maths calculation thingy?

He definitely makes a valid point where the controls are concerned - the inertia is more sensitive than a nerd's nose in hay fever season, and the up to jump diagonally arrangement is a chore. In fact, having *no* control over the jump arc at all is unforgivable in a 1991 Amiga game. Money bag, oil or underpants checkpoints (depending on where you are) help a tiny bit where the level restarts are concerned, yet it remains an extremely challenging game.



Zzap! declared the C64 version "a radical improvement on the movie!" underlining their review with an 82% grade, despite expressing reservations concerning its lack of variety.

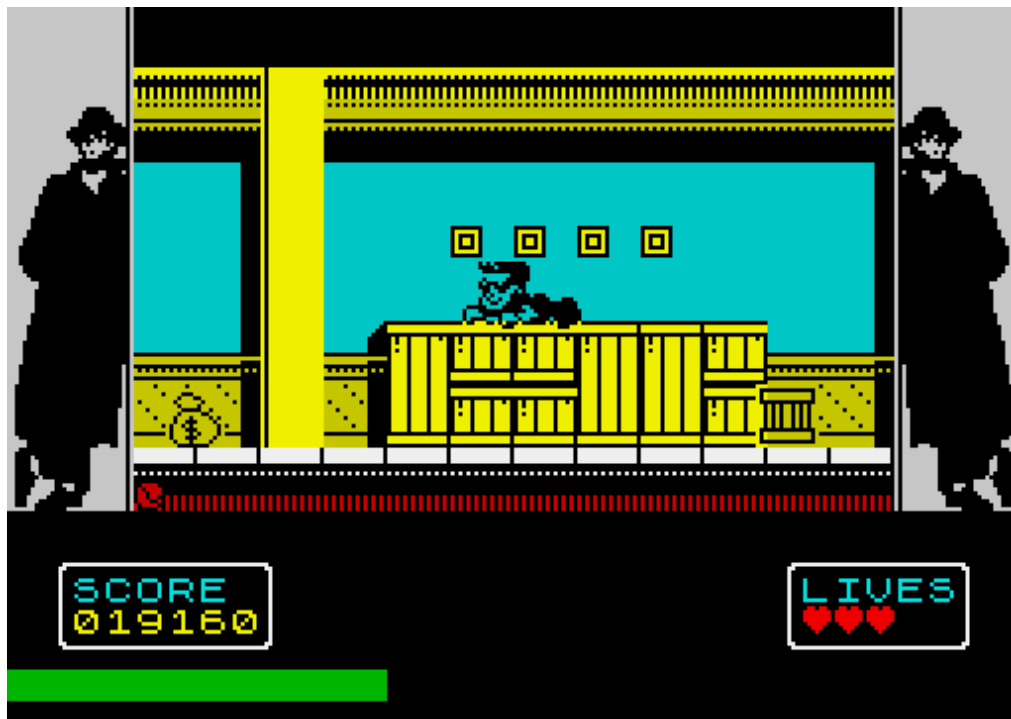
88% was Commodore Format's verdict, largely thanks to Ocean's refreshing deviation from beat 'em up and slidey puzzle mashups. Nevertheless, points were deducted due to the ostensibly linear gameplay.



Over on the Spectrum the play area is curiously bookended by a giant leaning likeness of Bruce on either side, no doubt to reduce the screen redraw drain on the limited system resources. That aside it's the same supremely playable criminal escapade squeezed onto an ageing 8-bit machine that shouldn't really be able to maintain the pace.

In 1991 Sinclair User championed Hudson Hawk as "the best Spectrum film license this year!" ...and this was in December just to head off any early January jokes. They stamped the "corker of a game" with their venerated SU Gold award and a 90% bottom line.

Crash were even more enamoured, reaching the opinion, "Hudson Hawk is an arcade puzzler's dream. Ocean have produced yet another winner." They capped their analysis with an admirable 93% score and the edict, "Go out and buy Hudson Hawk, now! And no half-inching it from the shop!"... Cockney rhyming slang for 'pinching' for those of you who speak real English.



James Leach of Your Sinclair pulled off such a convincing impersonation of someone who didn't have the faintest Scooby-Doo what the movie or game is about that I can't separate the jokes from the ineptitude. He had this straight man schtick down to a fine art, I'll give him that! The plot according to James - or the persona channelling James - is that Hawk is a kind of adventuring, Indiana Jones type chap who's on a mission to track down a collection of items stolen from Leo da Vinci's relatives. I thought it made a refreshing change anyway.

Hudson registered a temperature reading of 80 degrees on the YS thermometer. Wrapping up James surmised "...it's original, it's fun and I like it. So there."

Amstrad Action were so enthralled they chucked out the office sliced bread supplies and slathered their Hudson Hawk disks and cassettes with fettucini con funghi porcini instead. In other words they were jolly fond of it, enough to commit to print a stellar 94% assessment and the testimonial, "Huddy is

one of the best platform games we've seen, and great entertainment by anyone's standards".



Meanwhile back in Amigaland our critics left their loaves in the breadbin and weren't quite so ecstatic. Quirky controls and predictable gameplay I can live with, what's *truly* lacking is an exploding auctioneer - that would have been the icing on the layer cake! Haven't we all wanted to blow up Corrie's former butcher and supreme irritant at some point in our lives? I say, haven't we all wanted to blow up Fred Elliott (last seen in Doctor Who in 2016) at some point in our lives? I know / have.

...and if you thought *that* was a weak finale you must have forgotten the way the movie explains Tommy Five-Tone's miraculous survival from plunging over the edge of the castle terrace cliff-top in an explosives-rigged, flaming limousine.

Whether you choose to "Catch The Excitement" or "Catch The Laughter", you can always "Catch The Hawk" on DVD to relive the unparalleled 'magic' of this once in a lifetime wondrous phenomenon of movie-making pageantry.